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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000235

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ'S SELF-CORONATION; GOES AFTER ELECTRICITY,
OIL, AND PRESIDENT BUSH

REF: A. CARACAS 219
[B](#). CARACAS 215
[C](#). CARACAS 90

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Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(b).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: President Chavez promulgated the omnibus Enabling Law February 1, an instrument that gives him effectively unlimited power to rule by decree in eleven vaguely-defined areas for the next eighteen months. He then engaged in a rambling four-hour follow-on press conference in which he lashed out at President Bush, Deputy Secretary-designate John Negroponte, and U.S. foreign and

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domestic policy. At home, he announced the nationalization of ten electric companies, plans to vest at least 60% ownership of the oil sector in PDVSA hands, and the battle against poverty as priorities for his eighteen months of rule-by-fiat. Chavez's protracted, vitriolic anti-American tirade, however, dominated his address and appears to have been a ham-handed, defensive effort to counter President Bush's January 31 comments expressing concern about the radical direction of Chavez's government. END SUMMARY

OFF AND RUNNING

[1](#)2. (SBU) The National Assembly having passed the Enabling Law January 31 (ref a), Chavez promulgated the law less than 24 hours later, signing the measure in red ink. The Venezuelan President announced that one of his first decrees would involve the nationalization of the electric sector. Saying that it was a mistake to privatize the industry in the first place, Chavez rattled off a list of ten companies to be nationalized. Chavez also addressed the petroleum sector, iterating that PDVSA will assume no less than 60% ownership in the strategic association ventures in the Faja, and this process will be complete by May 1 (affected enterprises include Chevron, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, Statoil, and BP). "If they don't like it," Chavez amicably said, "they are free to leave."

TELL US HOW YOU REALLY FEEL

13. (SBU) Addressing members of the international press in the newly inaugurated Simon Bolivar press room at the Miraflores presidential mansion, Chavez teed off on President Bush. Nearly two hours of Chavez's address was a response to a simple question about Chavez's priorities for his newly-bestowed power to rule by decree. Chavez, however, steered his answer toward the United States. Responding to President Bush's January 31 comments on the Enabling Law and threats to democracy in Venezuela, Chavez chastised the President for not taking sufficient care of his own citizens.

Chavez said Bush preferred to see Americans die in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina rather than accept medical help from Cuba, Venezuela, or any other country (sic). Chavez claimed that there is more social inequality in the United States than in any other country and proceeded to recite a litany of poverty-related statistics. He said that the United States is spending billions of dollars on "massacres of families" in Iraq instead of alleviating poverty.

14. (C) Chavez echoed his Foreign Ministry's grotesque mischaracterizations of John Negroponte and his nomination as Deputy Secretary of State. Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have vehemently denounced Negroponte as a criminal twice in the last two weeks (refs b and c). Chavez joined the chorus, calling Negroponte a "criminal," nominated to be Deputy Secretary of State by "another criminal," President Bush. More specifically, Chavez called Bush a "war criminal" and "worse than a cockroach." Chavez labeled President Bush and Negroponte a "mafia" and said they should be tried and imprisoned.

OUT OF THIS WORLD

15. (SBU) Chavez invoked the names of more than one historical figure in his juvenile damnation of President

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Bush. Chavez said that if one were to compare the levels of "fascism" in the governments of Bush and Hitler, they would come out tied. Chavez's rant about the failure of the American "empire" to combat poverty included unflattering references to Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. Chavez called the proposed border fencing between Mexico and the United States "undignified" and said that its sole purpose was to keep out what Hamilton - according to Noam Chomsky - apocryphally referred to as the "great beast" - the poor and ignorant huddled masses. Chavez also channeled the spirit of Mao, saying the "empire" that is the United States is a "paper tiger." Chavez's hyperbole even went beyond earthly boundaries in condemnation of President Bush, saying that before the cataclysmic climate change there may have once been life on Mars; but, if so, it may have been destroyed "by gringo imperialism and capitalism."

CHAVEZ WARNS: BEWARE THE MONKEY WITH A RAZOR BLADE

16. (C) Chavez repeatedly called President Bush the "little gentleman" in heavily-accented English and, on one occasion, referred to the President as a "donkey." Chavez added that the President lacked the ability to manage even a little league baseball team, much less a country. Referring to American possession of nuclear weapons technology, Chavez claimed that President Bush may destroy the planet and "is as dangerous as a monkey with a razor blade."

COMMENT

17. (C) Chavez had toned down his anti-American rhetoric in

recent weeks, aiming his attacks at OAS Secretary General Insulza and Catholic Church leaders instead. President Bush's January 31 comments to the media regarding Venezuela, however, generated so much ire that Chavez dedicated the greater part of the promulgation of his new rule-by-decree powers to personal attacks on President Bush. That Chavez would convoke the international press to witness and record such a diatribe is clear evidence of his growing arrogance and disregard for international opinion. It also shows how thin-skinned he is about the mildest criticism and the extent to which he still suffers from what even some Chavistas refer to as "verbal incontinence." In terms of undermining his international reputation, however, Chavez remains his own worst enemy.

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